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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the scenario planning process implemented at the College of Marin (California). Scenario planning is a creative process in which a group of people who share a common fate develop stories about different ways their future might unfold, and use these stories to make decisions about what path to take. The Global Business Network (GBN), a unique membership organization that helps companies, governments, and non-profit organizations explore and anticipate the future, was a partner with the College in this effort. Outlined in this article are two workshops on scenario planning administered by the College of Marin. Assumptions about the future that guided the creation of stories included: (1) the population of Marin county will become significantly older; (2) the demand for higher education services in California will increase; (3) the skill level of most jobs will continue to rise; (4) access to the Internet will become widespread; and (5) corporate interests will continue to influence California politics. Workshop I primarily discussed the Asian finance crisis, with scenarios focusing on the impact of international financial instability on California's educational system. During Scenario Planning Workshop II, held in November, participants addressed the difficult task of recommending strategic priorities and actions to best position the College for the future. (AS)

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Scenario Planning at College of Marin

College of Marin

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Scenario Planning at College of Marin

College of Marin
Kentfield, CA 94904
March 1999

Scenario planning is an approach to planning that starts from the assumption that-much as we try-we simply cannot predict or control the future. We can only imagine different ways in which the future might turn, stake out a course that makes sense today, and try to be flexible and alert when the unexpected inevitably occurs.

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Workshop I

Introduction

In the Summer of 1998, College of Marin embarked on a scenario planning project to map out a strategic course for the next decade.

Scenario planning is an approach to planning that starts from the assumption that-much as we try-we simply cannot predict or control the future. We can only imagine different ways in which the future might turn, stake out a course that makes sense today, and try to be flexible and alert when the unexpected inevitably occurs.

In this spirit, scenario planning is a creative process in which a group of people who share a common fate work together to create stories about the different ways that their future might unfold, and then use these stories to make decisions about what path they want to take.

Scenario planning has been used by many of the world's most successful organizations to yield new strategic insights and to increase their ability to learn and adapt. Global Business Network, the partner with College of Marin on this project, is a renowned pioneer in the field of scenario planning.

Over the past several months, dozens of people who care about the future of College of Marin have contributed to this scenario planning effort in a variety of ways. Many partners are already supporting our scenario planning effort. A generous $20,000 gift from Frank Howard Allen Realty has funded purchase of computer hardware and special group decision making software, which supports quality planning. Community groups and College staff have begun debating issues and possibilities. We seek your comments. Broad contribution will help strengthen the "community" in community college.

On this web site, you'll find information about this project: exactly what is at stake, more about the scenario planning process, the work that's been done so far, and-the star of the show-the four scenario stories themselves about the future world that College of Marin will face to the year 2008.

Most importantly, we're asking everyone who cares about the future of College of Marin-the current students, faculty, administrators, as well as people who live or work in Marin County-to contribute their ideas and insights, too. Write us at jlisetor@marin.cc.ca.us

Our plan for the future direction of College of Marin is still very much a work in progress. We look forward to your contributions to this important effort.

What is Scenario Planning?

The idea of scenarios--telling possible stories about the future--is probably as old as humankind. A scenario is a tool for ordering one's perceptions about alternative future environments in which today's decisions might be played out. As a methodology, it has long been used by the military.

But only in the last 30 years, in the face of increasing uncertainty and complexity, have corporations and other large, global organizations begun to develop sophisticated scenario planning processes. Royal Dutch/Shell made the tool famous by using it to great effect twice--once to anticipate the Arab Oil embargo, and then again to anticipate and prepare for the dramatic drop in oil prices during the 1980s.

So what, Exactly, is Scenario Planning?

The process is highly interactive, intense, and imaginative. The initial phase usually involves rigorously challenging the mental maps that shape one's perceptions, and then searching for relevant information, often from unorthodox sources. We all see certain things, and have blinders on about others. Our perceptions are shaped by our past successes and failures, which may no longer be relevant. A good scenario planning project expands leaders' peripheral vision and forces them to challenge

their own assumptions.

The next steps are more analytical: identifying the driving forces (social, economic, political, and technological) and the predetermined elements (i.e., what is inevitable about the future, like many demographic factors that are already in the pipeline). These factors are then prioritized according to importance and uncertainty.

These exercises culminate in three or four carefully constructed scenarios. In practice, scenarios resemble a set of stories, written or spoken, built around carefully constructed plots with sound logical foundations.

Stories are an old way of organizing knowledge; when used as planning tools, they spawn fresh insights by encouraging-in fact, requiring-the willing suspension of disbelief. The test of a good scenario is not whether it portrays the future accurately but whether it enables an organization to learn and adapt.

Once the scenarios have been fleshed out and woven into a narrative, the team identifies their implications for the organization, and works out the options for action first within each scenario. Looking across the set of scenarios, the team identifies robust strategies that will work, regardless which future unfolds. Then the team lists leading indicators to be monitored on an ongoing basis--the events to watch for that will indicate which future (or combination of futures) is actually unfolding.

By rehearsing the future in this way, scenarios enable an organization to adapt more quickly to what is actually happening, and to anticipate better what could happen. In the face of some major new development, the organization doesn't have to spend months in denial, and then more months developing options. New proposals can be flown through the scenarios, using them as a sort of wind tunnel to test their resilience.

Decisions that have been pre-tested against a range of what fate may offer are more likely to stand the test of time. And taking an informed long view may give an organization the courage to stick to a set of priorities, rather than backing off in the face of resistance or short-term failure.

Scenario planning is intellectually rich and challenging. But it's not a dry academic exercise. It's a conversation, involving human beings who want to learn together. When it works, a group of people create something together--an analysis, a vision, a language for describing the world, a plan of action--that makes them more committed and able to work together effectively.

Why Use Scenario Planning at College of Marin?

As suggested above, scenario planning can be used in a variety of ways. At College of Marin, it was chosen as a planning tool for three main reasons:

Scenario planning has a proven track record in tapping the knowledge of a group of people with diverse perspectives to yield breakthrough insights and innovations. Throughout any organization, many people have ideas about where the future may be heading, but there is generally no established process for gathering such knowledge and putting it to good use. Scenario planning provides a concrete framework for sharing the insights of a broad cross-section of people in a way that often leads to fresh, new insights.

Scenario planning is especially useful in situations where a high level of participation is required to create a new future. In highly centralized bureaucracies or military dictatorships, a small number of people may be able to make decisions about the future direction of the organization. But at College of Marin, any plan for the future must involve the willing participation of a large number of people-faculty, staff, students, board members, and others-to make it work. Scenario planning provides a useful process for puling together all the major stakeholders in a strategic conversation that ultimately leads to shared vision and action.

Scenario planning is especially useful in situations where an organization may be suffering from "tunnel vision". At times, nearly every organization becomes so bogged down in the daily business of just getting by that people can lose sight of their larger sense of purpose, and lose touch with subtle changes taking place in the outside world. Scenario planning involves taking a big step back from these daily concerns for a moment and "lifting our heads above the clouds," to see the landscape from a fresh perspective and deeper sense of purpose.

About Global Business Network

Global Business Network is a unique membership organization, headquartered in Emeryville, California, that helps companies, governments, and non-profit organizations explore, anticipate, and shape the future. GBN is internationally acclaimed for its leadership role in the evolution and application of scenario thinking and planning. In fact, GBN's staff and network includes many of the pioneers of scenario planning at Royal Dutch/Shell, where this approach to researching and anticipating the future was developed more than 25 years ago.

Over the past decade, GBN has undertaken well over 100 proprietary scenario projects that have explored the future of--and strategies pertaining to--virtually every major industry, including information technology, telecommunications, health care, energy, transportation, media, and financial services.

GBN staff and global affiliates have also conducted regional and country-specific projects, some of which were designed to bring together key stakeholders from diverse sectors of the society and economy. In 1998, GBN's scenarios for the future of Japan, which involved dozens of that nation's most influential thinkers, were featured on the cover of The Economist magazine and in the New York Times.

Some of the member companies with which GBN has recently worked include IBM, Royal Dutch/Shell, Kodak, Fannie Mae, United Parcel Service, Nissan, AT&T, Amerada Hess, Allied Signal, Texaco, Xerox, Disney, Lucent, and Mattel.

GBN has also worked on numerous projects in the public sector, including a great deal of work in the area of education. In 1992, working closely with the National Education Association, GBN published scenarios on the future of higher education in California.

You can learn more about GBN by visiting their web site at: http://www.gbn.org

Introduction to the Scenario Stories

When you start spinning yarns about the future, there are an infinite number of stories to choose from. In this project, we used the "matrix method" to decide which stories about the future would be most useful and interesting to tell.

At the workshop on July 21-22, we asked the participants: If you could know just two things about the future that would enable you to create a sound long-term strategy, what would you like to know?

After much deliberation, the group agreed that they wanted to know:

What will be the level of state funding for California's community colleges? and

Will the market for higher education in California be a "buyers' market" (too much supply for the level of demand) or a "sellers' market" (not enough supply to meet the demand).

The difference between a buyers' market and a sellers' market is the difference between a world in which colleges have to bend over backwards to meet the needs of students-by offering those courses that students most want, at the times they want to take them-as opposed to a world in which most colleges can pretty much do whatever they want, without having to worry about attracting enough students.

We then made two lines with the ends marked "high state funding ... low state funding" and "buyers' market for education ... sellers' market for education" and crossed them to form a matrix. This matrix represents the basic plot dynamic of the four stories that the group chose to develop.

Of course, once we had this basic framework, we had to look at a lot of different issues, too: the role of technology, changes in the workplace, migration trends in California-to name just a few.

However, one thing we did not look at in any of the scenarios is the College of Marin itself. The whole idea of these stories is to present some very different ways in which the outside world might change during this time-whether College of Marin likes it or not. After all, we do not choose the future that confronts us; we can only choose what we do with the hand we are dealt.

The point of telling these stories in such detail is that they lead us to this one question: If this was the future, then what should College of Marin do?

What We Think We Already Know About the Future

Since scenario planning is about creatively exploring our uncertain future, it is also important to first take stock of what is already certain about the future.

Participants at the July 21-22 workshop agreed that they were already certain of the following elements of the future that will confront College of Marin:

The population of Marin County will become significantly older.

The "Echo Boom" generation (children of the Baby Boom) will enter their college-age years, creating increasing demand for higher education services in California.

The growth of the so-called "knowledge economy" will continue. That is, the skill level of most jobs will continue to rise and knowledge-based industries will see strong growth, due to rising education levels of the population and the increasing use of information technology.

Access to the Internet will become very widespread, if not necessarily universal.

Corporate interests will continue to be a major force in determining what is and is not possible to accomplish in California politics.

To be sure, there are many other things that one might argue are equally certain about the future. But workshop participants agreed that these were the most important certainties about the future-and as such should be taken into account in any scenario for College of Marin.

"Beggars at the Banquet"

Low State Funding
High Competition for Education

Highlights

The Asian finance crisis drives California into recession in 1999-2002. Conservative politicians gain power in Sacramento and freeze all non-mandatory state spending. Even after the economy recovers, the new leaders remain in power and keep education funding tight.
The coming of age of the huge "Echo Boom" generation drives increasing demand for higher education, but community colleges lack the resources to respond.
A combination of new and old competitors lure away the most motivated and lucrative students from California's colleges and universities, hitting community colleges hardest.
By 2008, community colleges across the state are in a state of decline and turmoil, despite a relatively healthy economy.
In the end, the worse fears of educators in the late '90s turned out to be true.

The Story

The Millennium closed with the Asian finance crisis leading to a moderate recession during 1999-2002, which hit California harder than the rest of the nation. Unemployment reached a peak of about 8% in late 2000 – not as bad as during the early '90s, perhaps, but it hurt badly enough just the same.

As the economy tightened, conservatives in both parties gained seats in the legislature and held on to the Governor's mansion in the elections of 1998, 2000, and 2002. Once again, the anti-tax and anti-immigration movements gained steam as many Californians circled their wagons around the camp of economic self-interest. The short-lived period of California state budget surpluses came to an abrupt end as the new leaders froze state funding for public higher education – indeed, for all non-mandatory state programs – at 1998 levels for the next three years.

Despite the funding freeze, demand for higher education grew steadily, as the peak of the huge "Echo Boom" generation (children of the Baby Boomers) started to reach their college-going years and as many unemployed workers returned to school to beef up their skills. Many students who were already enrolled in programs also stayed in school, hoping to ride out the downturn.

However, state campuses were in no condition to handle the increasing demand, and responded the only way they knew how: by raising fees, freezing enrollments,

and trying to protect quality as best they could. The UC system, less dependent on state funding, was better able to scrape by with this strategy than the state colleges and community colleges, which bore the brunt of the pain. Unable to raise fees as high or attract as much outside funding, most state and community colleges were forced to close courses and programs, and to raise class sizes just to get by.

During 2001-2003, many community college campuses cut costs by offering a new round of early retirement incentive deals to older faculty. However, as the funding crisis refused to go away, many of the vacated positions were left unfilled, further exacerbating the access crisis. And most of the few new faculty who were hired were temporary contractors – creating an increasingly divided "two-tier" faculty that diminished the sense of community on many campuses.

By 2003, the California economy had finally turned the corner and was returning to health. Still, the conservative politicians who had gained power during the downturn held tight onto the state purse strings. Modest increases in funding for higher education were finally passed in the Fiscal Year 2004 budget, but the unpredictable "boom-bust" cycle of state support again made it hard for administrators to plan too far into the future.

At any rate, after four years of virtually flat revenue growth, many campuses were left with seriously crumbling infrastructures. For the foreseeable future, the bulk of any funding increases would have to go towards the costly backlog of deferred maintenance. Rebuilding quality and expanding enrollments would have to wait.

The next blow to community colleges came from Bill Gates, of all people, when Microsoft introduced a major breakthrough in 2003 – a "windowless" operating system that allowed users to glide effortlessly between programs. The system was the hottest new software release since the first edition of Windows, and most businesses adopted it immediately – despite its premium price tag. Financially strapped community colleges were, of course, unable to acquire the software. And prospective students in many fields were understandably reluctant to invest in an education that did not include access to equipment that was standard everywhere else.

By this time, California's public campuses were widely seen as offering a declining quality of service at a rising price delivered by part-time faculty using antiquated resources. Not surprisingly, competitors – both new and old – found the combination of surging demand and a weak state system too tempting to resist, and began to target the most lucrative and desirable students from all segments of the state system.

Colleges in other states, both public and private, eagerly stepped up their recruitment at high schools across California. Large businesses, frustrated with poor responsiveness and inadequate facilities at state campuses, expanded internal training programs and "corporate universities," and contracted out the rest to private training firms. For individuals willing to pay for their own job training, a host of new, flexible private institutions rushed in the fill the void, following the lead of the rapidly growing University of Phoenix. For seniors and others looking for fun learning experiences, Walt Disney and other California-based entertainment industry giants created new recreational education franchises. Meanwhile, online courses from Internet-based providers also started to pick off some students, although the growth of this medium was more gradual than some pundits had predicted as most students continued to prefer a "high touch" environment.

The overall effect of all this competition was one of "cherry picking" – the loss of

the best and brightest students from the state colleges and community colleges, which were left to attend to those who could not muster the funding or the test scores to go elsewhere.

Then, in February 2006, tragedy struck: A 6.8-level earthquake hit the picturesque community of Ocean View, on the Central Coast. Six buildings collapsed at Ocean View Community College, killing dozens of workers and students, and injuring hundreds. The state responded by mandating that all campuses conduct detailed reviews of their seismic safety and emergency preparedness plans. Later that year, the Governor ordered a total of nearly 200 buildings condemned across the state system of community colleges.

Educators and their friends mounted a campaign for a statewide bond issue to rebuild the higher education infrastructure, but the $25 billion price tag was more than voters could swallow, and the measure failed in November. Shortly after, the Governor closed three community college campuses that had become insolvent, and placed seven more campuses under state receivership. Despite an urgent need for more space, many campuses were forced to demolish or leave vacant whole buildings.

In 2008, with more than 100,000 Californians being turned away by the state system of higher education, anti-immigrant activists placed a referendum on the November ballot to charge out-of-state tuition and fees to all non-U.S. citizens, including longtime state residents. The measure was only narrowly defeated, attracting 48% of the vote. Another ballot measure that would have abolished tenure in the state system of higher education also lost, but only after gaining support of 45% of voters.

Today, of course, in late 2008, the California economy is humming along again, and the market for education is brisk. However, after a decade of fiscal anorexia, California's community colleges are ill-positioned to seize the moment. Most community college campuses remain in a state of crisis that includes regular episodes of social unrest over declining access and rising fees, continued closing of entire programs, and labor strife, including occasional strikes by faculty and classified staff.

California's community colleges find themselves to be, in effect, "beggars at the banquet" – fighting for table scraps in one of the wealthiest states of one of the wealthiest nations in the world, and wondering just how, exactly, did things manage to go so utterly and terribly wrong?

"For Sale to the Highest Bidder"

Low State Funding

Low Competition for Education

Highlights

The Asian finance crisis deepens and spreads, ultimately causing a prolonged slowdown in U.S. economic growth, if not an outright depression. California is one of the hardest-hit states.

The Year 2000 Problem proves to be a very costly mess that slows down the rate of technological progress for several years.

As a result of the recession, foreign immigration to California slows significantly and a steady outflow of natives leaves for other U.S. states, hastening the aging of the state's population.

Health care costs in the U.S. and California grow rapidly, due in part to

rising demands for long-term care and new (and costly) advances in the detection and treatment of cancer.
As the health care spending crunch dominates the California state budget, funding for higher education is severely restricted for much of the 2000s. Unable to fund higher education properly, the California Legislature allows the Education Code to sunset, essentially turning campuses loose to pursue policies and strategies of their own choosing – including setting their own fees – while providing only a basic level of support.
By 2008, community colleges are struggling with the new reality of being forced to become more entrepreneurial in a sluggish economic climate. Those colleges that are able to identify and tap strong market niches or to marshal local tax or philanthropic support are doing fine, but many others are on the brink of collapse.

The Story

For nearly two years the Asian finance crisis held the American public in suspense. Would the crisis that was hitting so many countries finally land on American shores, or could we hope to watch the storm pass us by?

By the summer of 1999, the suspense was finally over. Yes, it really did matter in a tightly interdependent global economy when nearly an entire continent fell on hard times. No, the U.S. could not remain an island of prosperity in a sea of falling currencies. The time of reckoning had come, as bad debts bled several major U.S. banks-dry. Average Americans who had invested aggressively in 401(k) plans and mutual funds during the '90s watched helplessly as the Dow Jones Index fell below 7,000 and kept drifting south, wiping out billions of dollars in accumulated wealth.

As the crisis spread, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan repeatedly put his foot to pedal of the economy in 1999, lowering interest rates to unheard-of levels, but it was too little, too late. By the end of that year, the nationwide unemployment rate was running at 8 percent, and rising. In mid-2001, it reached a peak of just over 10%. California, with its close trading and investment ties to Asia, was among the first and hardest hit states, and saw its unemployment reach a high of 12% when students looked for jobs that Summer.

Meanwhile, as the nation was struggling with the downturn, another ominous clock was ticking. As the new Millennium approached, it became clear that the Year 2000 was more than a "problem" – if not quite the Biblical-scale catastrophe that some had feared. Across the country, critical software systems crashed in both expected and unexpected places. Hospital emergency rooms closed their doors for repair and major airlines were grounded intermittently; power outages flared up unpredictably across the country. Some newer-model cars with elaborate electrical systems wouldn't even run. Ordinary household appliances like coffee machines and VCRs suddenly went on strike.

But the most important impact of "Y2K" was that it diverted precious resources away from investment in growth at a time when it was badly needed. And it slowed down progress in electronic commerce and Internet usage, which was supposed to be taking off by now. After all, consumers whose bank records had been deleted and whose credit cards often didn't work at gas stations were in no mood to trust online vendors, even if they seemed honest enough. Besides, companies were too busy cleaning up the mess to launch complicated new online commerce programs.

One immediate impact of the recession was that the flow of people into California was reduced to a trickle, as had happened during the last bad recession a decade

earlier. Although foreign immigration didn't stop entirely, it slowed significantly. Among native U.S. residents, thousands of people fled California's high unemployment in favor of other Western states that were not as hard hit, and where the cost of living was lower.

The slowdown in population growth, although a relief to some, had the effect of hastening the graying of California's population, since most of the people fleeing the state tended to be young adults. With the oldest Baby Boomers now pushing 60, the state slowly began to take on a different look and feel – more like Europe, Japan, or Florida than the dynamic, young place it had always been famous for.

The graying of the Boomers couldn't have come at a worse time. After a period of relatively restrained growth during 1993-1998, health care costs had begun creeping upwards again in 1999, and were now running at twice the rate of inflation. Analysts blamed the trend on a number of factors: the rising price of new prescription drugs, diminishing returns to cost-control efforts after a more than a decade of managed care programs, and surging demand for long-term care among the state's growing population over the age of 80, among others.

To make matters worse, California's high unemployment rate meant that a growing number of people became eligible for Medicaid and Medi-Cal, whose costs soared. Increasing numbers of employers did not offer health care for their lower-level employees, further swelling the public rolls.

Meanwhile, as the Boomers were confronting their mortality, the biotechnology and biomedical industries had been working overtime to ease their various pains. During 2002-03, several companies announced breakthroughs in highly effective screening tests and early-stage treatments for a number of major cancers, including lung, colon, breast, and prostate. The tests were quickly approved by the FDA and recommended for all people over the age of 50, but came with a stiff price tag, thanks to their well-protected patents.

The announcements came at a time when the peak of the Baby Boom was entering the high-risk age groups for these life-threatening conditions, and led to a heated public debate over access to the new tests and treatments. Private insurers generally agreed to provide coverage for their premium-level clients, but balked at the idea of paying for the new tests for all enrollees. For many people, the only option was to pay for the cost themselves or look to the government for help.

In Sacramento, the issue of access to the tests became a political hot-potato that many members of the huge Baby Boom generation saw as literally a matter of life or death. Eventually, legislators agreed that a democratic society could not tolerate such a radical division between health care haves and have-nots, and made a vague commitment to find the money somewhere to pay for the tests for Californians over the age of 50 who could not afford them.

The political clout of the Baby Boom also played a key role in the surging costs associated with long-term care. Although the Boomers themselves were far from needing this level of assistance, the over-80 group that did need it was, by and large, their parents. As increasing numbers of elderly elected to go to nursing homes rather than be a burden to their families, state costs ballooned. At first, the state tried to contain costs by restricting access to nursing homes and other long-term care options. But the politically vociferous Boomers would have none of that, and after a few large heads rolled in Sacramento, politicians quickly got the message that millions of families across the state now saw long-term care to be just as sacred as Social Security. After all, even relatively affluent retired people could

quickly "spend down" all their savings quickly on long-term care unless they had top-of-the line insurance.

Gradually, the California economy began to recover in 2003-2004, but the increasing health care costs continued to crowd out nearly everything else in the state budget, similar to the effect of prison-related spending in the late 1980s and early 1990s. State budget authorities resorted to fiscal sleights-of-hand to create the appearance, if not the reality, of balanced budgets in the face of the crisis, but few were fooled.

One of the ugliest side-effects of the new political and budget reality was that it often pitted the state's largely White middle-aged and older population against its largely minority younger population in a tussle over scarce resources. It was hardly a mystery, however, as to who would win that battle.

By the time the state budget was passed in the Summer of 2004, the system of higher education had seen no increase in funding since 1999, after adjusting for inflation – with no relief in sight.

As students returned to campus that Fall, angry protests broke out across the state over declining enrollments and the rapidly deteriorating quality of the state system. At Santa Cruz, students set fire to the administration building (luckily, no one was hurt). Wildcat strikes by graduate student instructors crippled the UC system, while faculty at several CSU campuses and community colleges threatened to walk off the job.

Lawmakers and education leaders responded by calling an emergency summit in Sacramento in November. After weeks of heated debate, they finally agreed to a radical restructuring of the state system that featured a sunsetting of the state's longstanding Education Code in order to give campuses increased flexibility to pursue alternative sources of funding. Lawmakers and educators agreed that, if the state could not live up to its obligation to fund the system properly, it should empower campuses to explore all possible opportunities. Campuses were given a high ceiling for maximum fees they were now allowed to charge, and unprecedented flexibility about what kinds of programs they could develop and offer.

Meanwhile, despite the tight economy, market demand for higher education remained quite strong, due to the coming-of–age of the "Echo Boom" generation (children of the Baby Boomers) and the growing sense that a college education was a mandatory calling card in an uncertain economic world. Employers, faced with a very loose labor market, felt they could demand an ever-higher level of credentials even for entry-level work.

Ironically, the booming health care demand that led to the funding crisis also created an opportunity, as demand grew steadily for education and training of medical professionals at all types and levels of expertise, further driving demand for higher education.

Two areas of the education market that were soft, however, were work-related training for companies and recreational education. With profit margins tight and plenty of workers to choose from, it was well understood that each worker was responsible for taking care of his or her own development. And a weak stock market and job market prevented the recreation education market from growing as many had expected.

At the same time, the growth in new private competitors for education and training services was restrained due to the poor economy. With employers placing an increasing value on proven credentials, the barrier to entry for new educational institutions remained quite high. After all, it's one thing to offer a few courses, but becoming accredited to offer full-blown degree programs requires serious investments in time and money. In addition, relatively slow progress in distance learning programs due to Y2K spillover effects prevented other new competitors from arising as quickly as they might have.

California's community colleges thus faced an unusual predicament: how to respond to relatively strong demand for education in a world where there was little growth in competition but also very low levels of state funding.

In response to this challenge, community colleges across the state scrambled to identify local market niches that were commercially viable, and for which they had existing programs. Most campuses raised fees dramatically and closed some programs in order to focus on developing those services that could pay the bills.

For some, this meant a greater focus on general education, as a cost-effective point-of-entry solution for the Echo Boomers. For others, it meant a strong focus on health care-related training. For still others, it meant developing strong partnerships with local businesses in other industries that showed promise for growth. For yet others, it meant focusing on the recreational education market among those aging Boomers and others who were still affluent. A few ambitious community colleges even converted themselves into quasi-private, four-year residential institutions to fully take advantage of the Echo Boom demand. As campuses picked their best niches, local conditions clearly came to play a much greater role in shaping the focuses of each campus than in the past.

By 2008, there is an enormous gap in well-being among the state's community college campuses. The campuses that have fared well are those that were able to respond quickly to market opportunities or to attract outside funding from local taxes, philanthropy, or business partnerships. And a few campuses were just lucky enough to have solid programs in fields that are today in strong demand (especially health care education). But those campuses where none of these conditions exist have generally fallen into disrepair – and several have even shut their doors.

But in one important respect, all community colleges are today in the same boat: They are all forced to sell their services "to the highest bidder," if they want to survive.

"The Great (Education) Society"
High State Funding
Low Competition for Education
Highlights

The California economy is quite strong to 2008, but most new jobs in the industries leading growth require a high level of education and skills.
Increased foreign immigration of lower-skilled workers, especially from Mexico, divides the state more sharply by class and worsens social problems.
Facing severe labor shortages in skilled occupations, state business leaders lobby for better funding for education to train lower-skilled workers.
A political consensus emerges that past policies to address social issues – welfare, affirmative action, "get tough" crime laws, and border controls –

have all failed, and that investing heavily in education is the only effective long-run solution.
By 2008, community colleges are thriving under "Master Plan 2" – a powerful mandate to address the state's social needs by a massive investment in public higher education.

The Story

By mid-1999, the economies of Asia – and much of the world with them – had been swinging wildly in several directions at once for two years with no end in sight. Five-hundred point swings in the Dow Jones Industrial Index had become almost routine – but still unnerving to anyone with a mutual fund account.

After years of jawboning Japanese leaders about financial reform, Western leaders had all but given up on the world's second-largest economy leading a way out of the crisis. But Westerners had forgotten a key historical fact about the Japanese: that they tend to take a long time to come to consensus, but that once they do, they can act very fast indeed.

In the Summer of 1999, Japanese Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa gracefully resigned to make way for a new generation of U.S.-trained whiz kids who put in place a package of financial reforms that stunned outsiders with its depth and breadth. Traders and investors around the globe breathed a heavy sigh of relief at Japan's decisive action and got back to the business of making money again. Gradually, the developing economies of Asia returned to health, spurred on by exports to a rebounding Japan.

Against this more optimistic backdrop, the California economy, which suffered a mild downturn during 1999-2001, now rebounded with a vengeance. This new wave of growth was broad-based, led by the three pillars of the new global economy: high technology, entertainment, and international trade, with the budding biotechnology and biomedicine industries playing a supporting role.

Despite the return of economic growth, however, all was not golden in the Golden State. The majority of new jobs in these growth industries required a high level of skills, and the state had already been feeling the pangs of labor shortages for skilled workers in many fields – even during the downturn years.

As the economy heated up, the shortage of skilled workers became so acute that Intel, 3Com, and other large firms established full-time recruiting offices in large cities across the country. A coalition of major employers hired advertising giant Chiat-Day to create an aggressive media campaign – "Come Home to the Dream" – to try to lure back some of the thousands of skilled professionals who had fled California for other Western states over the years.

Meanwhile, just when everything looked quiet on the international front, financial turmoil reared its ugly head again – this time in Latin America. Apparently, not having learned the lessons of the 1970s and '80s, investors in Mexico and Brazil had again been quietly building a speculative bubble in the '90s – one that burst loudly in the summer of 2002 when the Mexican government announced a 40% devaluation in the peso.

The impact of the crisis was swiftly felt in California. As foreign investors – mostly from the U.S. – pulled funds out of their country, hundreds of thousands of Mexicans followed the money North. Over the next five years, Mexican immigration would run about double what it had been before the crisis – or an

estimated 200,000 persons a year, including illegal flows.

This increased immigration created an enormous tension. While state businesses were in desperate need for more skilled workers, the border was being crashed by thousands of new lower-skilled workers. The INS expanded border patrol forces and tried to hold the line – but to no avail. As in the past, the border proved too large to control, and with a strong economy, demand for cheap labor in service industries, agriculture, and households was simply too strong.

The new migrants created yet another challenge for the state. As population growth surged, California's reputation for quality of life became increasingly tarnished, making it even harder for companies to attract skilled workers from outside. The return of rising housing prices only made matters worse. If businesses wanted more skilled workers in California, it was becoming clear, they would have to find them within the state's borders.

Increasingly, California was becoming a state divided between two classes: well-paid knowledge workers and their poorly paid servants, many of them black and brown, or newly arrived. This split was further exacerbated by the return of the bull run in the U.S. stock market, which added to the wealth of the haves, only increasing their distance from the have-nots. The continued decline of employment in manufacturing industries and persistent poverty among many African-Americans didn't help any, either.

Increasingly, the state – and especially Southern California – looked and felt like a Third World country, with a huge gap between the rich, living in high-security enclaves, and the poor, dwelling in barrios and ghettos not far away.

This "Third-Worldification" of California attracted international media attention in the summer of 2003, when major tourist attractions around Los Angeles and San Francisco were hit by high-profile acts of random violence. In the most sensational case, the German Finance Minister was mugged at knifepoint while vacationing with his family at Disneyland.

Leading up to the election of 2004, the state had reached a boiling point. A Field Poll taken that summer found 64% of Californians agreeing with the statement that "the greatest problem facing the state is unequal access to economic opportunity". However, because of perceived past failures, the public also expressed deep suspicion of traditional liberal policies such as welfare and affirmative action. Further, the poll found that voters had become cynical about "get tough" crime laws and ever-higher prison spending, which they saw as ineffective and costly.

Of all proposed solutions, only "dramatic increases in investment in education and training" attracted a solid majority support. With state revenues running strong from the growth in income of middle and upper-class residents, voters felt the state could actually afford to make serious investments in the labor force of the future. Indeed, many wondered, could they afford not to?

Following the lead of public opinion, in November 2004, a new generation of pragmatic liberal leaders won control of California Legislature. The new breed of politicians promised a fresh approach to social problems – to shift spending "from handouts and handcuffs to a helping hand up". The new leaders acted swiftly, first by phasing out what was left of the state's welfare programs, except for the most desperately needy, and redirecting the resources to education, job training, and child care programs.

Next, with the strong backing of the state's business lobby, they passed a substantial tax increase that fell heaviest on the wealthy, with a large share of the funds earmarked specifically for education. Even some conservatives reluctantly backed the package in the hopes that the new programs might be the only way to contain rising social unrest in the state.

With the large "Echo Boom" generation (children of the Baby Boom) straining capacity at the state's four-year public colleges and universities, much of the emerging mandate to educate the workers of tomorrow fell to the state's community colleges. This made sense anyway, policymakers argued, since community colleges give the most "bang for buck," produce the quickest results, and provide the level of education most needed by the lower-skilled residents of the state. In order to help community colleges meet their ambitious new mandate of serving thousands of new students, state leaders fell in line behind a program to gradually restore funding per student to the national average within three years, and to generously expand financial aid and loan programs to the neediest students. Evoking warm memories of Clark Kerr, supporters dubbed the program as "Master Plan 2".

However, even with the additional funding, community colleges were hard-pressed to ramp up capacity quickly enough – especially with labor shortages constraining the supply of new faculty. So, in early 2005, the Legislature approved a bond issue to install equipment for via videoconferencing hookups and Internet connections in all campuses in order to enable each professor to reach more students. While costly, budget analysts argued this approach was far more economical than building new campuses – which couldn't be done fast enough, anyway. That Fall, voters concurred, passing the measure handily.

The following year, in November 2006, Victoria Hernandez, a San Diego-area Congresswoman, shocked the Sacramento establishment by winning the Governor's race on a platform of "One California, Many Californians" – pledging to unify the state's many racial and ethnic groups while honoring the state's diversity. Hernandez eagerly jumped on the bandwagon for education spending and pledged to ensure that the mandate of "Master Plan 2" was faithfully executed during her administration.

By 2008, as we know, California' s community colleges are once again thriving under a clear and well-funded mandate to create economic opportunity for the state's less fortunate and newly arrived residents. Of course, many social problems persist, but there is a strong sense that something meaningful is being done to address them over the long term.

"Uncle Harry's Will"
High State Funding
High Competition for Education
Highlights

After a brief hiccup during the Asian finance crisis of the late 1990s, rapid growth in the U.S. (and California) high technology sector leads the world into the most powerful economic boom of the modern era.
By the early 2000s, most Americans have Internet access via an affordable new device that combines the telephone, television and computer, and is linked to global networks with virtually limitless bandwidth.
With financial backing from a new generation of high-tech millionaires,

free-market libertarians increasingly dominate California politics.
A booming economy leads to massive state budget surpluses. However, the new political leadership makes funding increases for education conditional on acceptance of a controversial program of vouchers that subjects all public colleges and universities to the test of the marketplace.
Gradually, new models for higher education emerge in which students assemble customized learning experiences that combine online, multimedia "high tech" content with campus-based "high touch" personalized attention.
By 2008, most community colleges are doing well enough, but those that have learned to play by the rules of the new networked economy are thriving beyond their wildest dreams.

The Story

If generals are doomed to always be fighting the last war, it seems, the American media are doomed to fret endlessly about "crises" just as they are on the brink of becoming non-issues.

In the 1980s, the media frightened the American public about being overtaken by the Japanese, who were "invading" our shores with imports and "buying up" our country. By the end of the '90s, of course, the Japanese "threat" had tuned into a sad joke. It was hard to remember why we had gotten so excited.

Similarly, in the 1990s, Americans worked themselves into a frenzy over a global finance crisis and a Year 2000 Problem – just at the point when international trade and technological progress were on the brink of leading us into the biggest economic boom of the modern era.

In retrospect, of course, the future is always obvious. So it's important to recall how and why things turned out as they did – and to remind ourselves that it could have happened otherwise.

Rather than a Year 2000 "Problem," that year saw two developments that were to forever change the face of the modern world. First, late that Summer, the long-awaited breakthrough in bandwidth capacity was announced by an obscure firm in Utah. A few months later, another small firm in Silicon Valley revealed that they had found an elegant solution that merged all the capabilities of the telephone, television, and computer into a single $500 box whose sleek design and user-friendly interface almost seemed like overkill.

When these two innovations were combined, it made the Microsoft-Intel "power alliance" look like a friendly neighborhood block party. Immediate real-time transfer of data, video, and sound suddenly became cheap and easy for businesses and middle-class households alike.

In retrospect, it is already difficult today to imagine life without these standard capabilities. But it's impossible to overstate the impact that their introduction had at the time. Throughout the economy, the new devices broke open a host of opportunities previously unimagined. Barriers of time and space were obliterated, as immediate, two-way access to vast amounts of information became the norm. The changes were often chaotic, but the overall direction was unmistakably upwards as industry after industry was restructured under the new rules of a fully wired economy.

At first, the technology-led boom was restricted to the domestic U.S. economy, just as in the 1950s and '60s. In short order, though, the struggling economies of

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Asia (and a few other places) bent over backwards to churn out low-cost lower-tech consumer goods that would sell in the U.S. And as their economies gradually recovered, American high-tech products found vast new markets, setting in motion a powerful, virtuous circle of growth.

Meanwhile, in California, a new generation of high technology millionaires began to flex their political muscles. With their wealth growing by the day, high-tech entrepreneurs increasingly used political donations to set the tone and agenda of political debate in the state.

This trend led to a strong swing towards libertarian values and policies in both major parties (although the Libertarian Party itself remained a bit player). The emerging leadership in Sacramento was socially liberal and zealously pro-free market. Democrats and Republicans varied less in their basic philosophy about what works, and more in their choice of problems to focus on – with Democrats seeking market-based solutions to social problems and Republicans emphasizing quality of life issues like traffic congestion, crime, and air quality.

In 2002, California voters elected as Governor Brian Mooney, founder and president of Exegesis, a Web-based global finance network, who spent a record $60 million of his own money on the campaign – finally scoring a victory for wealthy outsiders in California politics. Unlike previous self-financed candidates, Mooney was charismatic, articulate, and politically savvy – a highbrow populist who preached bottom-line "common sense," peppered with doses of Eastern spirituality.

Mooney entered office to find the state enjoying unprecedented budget surpluses. However, rather than dole out the goodies in the traditional way, he took a new strategy for dealing with entrenched agencies: To make them an offer they couldn't refuse. Mooney and his allies in the Legislature dangled promises of large funding increases before agency directors – but only in exchange for major concessions about how they do their business, demanding that agencies become more entrepreneurial and responsive to the public.

Bemused newspaper editorialists compared Mooney to an eccentric "Uncle Harry," who leaves his kids large sums of money in his will, but only on the condition that they do specific things that he wants, like finish college, get married, and have kids. The children may grumble, but in the end everyone knows they'll do what Harry says.

In the case of higher education, Mooney offered institutions a whopping 20% funding hike in exchange for concessions on accountability: that individual campuses commit to meeting specific target rates for course completion, degree completion, semester-to-semester retention, and job placement for graduates.

But the real linchpin of Mooney's plan for higher education was a proposal to create state-funded vouchers that students could take to the California institution of their choice – public or private – in order to spur competition between campuses over the quality, relevance, and convenience of their programs. Mooney's plan called for raising tuition and fees throughout the state system while providing vouchers to all eligible students on a sliding-fee scale based on financial need. In this way, the system evolved from a low-tuition, low-aid approach towards a high-tuition, high-aid one that required students from wealthy families to pay more for services while giving the less affluent close to a free ride. Even after the fee increases and vouchers were put in place, state campuses remained less expensive than private schools – but that advantage was shrinking fast.

Although administrators and faculty across the state system were appalled at many of Mooney's measures, the temptation of higher funding proved too great and the public support behind the affable Mooney too strong. In the end, they agreed to his terms, but only after Mooney consented to leave faculty tenure intact – for now.

As Mooney's plan was being put in place, demand for higher education services in California soared. With a high-flying knowledge-based economy, the huge "Echo Boom" generation (children of the Baby Boom) flocked to campuses at ever-higher rates, population growth in the state was strong, and companies invested more than ever in training their employees.

This booming demand for education gave rise to a proliferation of new private providers in all areas of the market – for job-related training, general education, and recreational learning. Out-of-state schools aggressively marketed their services to Californians through distance learning programs. Competition grew most quickly in markets for specific coursework, and more slowly for full-blown degree programs, which required more time to build and win accreditation for.

Even with the increased competition, demand for education ran high enough that few public campuses had to worry about attracting enough students. Still, state campuses found that, if they wanted to attract their share of the state's best and brightest students, they had would have to meet their ever-higher expectations by designing courses that students demanded most and at the hours that they wanted to take them.

Meanwhile, as brand-name universities developed content for online delivery to a national market, the traditional "funnel" model of teaching – where a lone professor stands behind a lectern and "pours" content into students' heads – was gradually becoming a thing of the past. After all, how many music lecturers could compete with a Music 101 online multimedia course packaged at Harvard that intersperses musical passages with commentary from the nation's top specialists and documentary film footage of the musicians' lives, and which a student can "attend" at any hour she chooses, as many times as she wants?

By the Fall semester of 2005, such "blockbuster" multimedia content could be found for pretty much any general education course that could attract a large market. As a result, the role of professor was steadily being transformed from that of talking head into that of coach and mentor – a person who meets with students to discuss the material and assess their progress in learning.

In this way, the advent of distance learning gave rise to a new model of higher education: the "open campus". Increasingly, colleges came to be seen as places where students put together customized learning experiences from courses offered both on-site and online. In his second term, Mooney hastened this trend by establishing a new state credentialling authority to verify the quality of online courses and by requiring all state campuses to accept all credits for outside courses that met these high standards.

By 2008, community colleges that have successfully embraced the "open campus" model tend to fall into two categories: the "focused specialists" and the "wired generalists". The "focused specialists" consist of schools that saw the writing on the cyber-wall early on and narrowed their focus to just a few core disciplines – usually fields in which they already excelled and in which students continued to demand a high level of personal attention. The most successful of these schools also create online content for students across the state, country, and even globally.

By contrast, the "wired generalists" are those community colleges that still provide general education, but which now do so largely as brokers and aggregators of content from a variety of sources. In these schools, faculty act as learning journey guides to help students navigate through the bewildering array of course offerings that are available both on and off campus.

Interestingly, both of these types of successful schools combine "high touch" with "high tech" approaches – but in different ways. By contrast, the least successful schools are those that still try to do a little bit of everything – and none of it terribly well – and that offer only weak support and guidance to outside offerings. Of course, there are also quite a few "Cyber U's" out there – online intermediaries such as the Western Governors' University that bundle online content from a variety of providers and which have no physical presence. But most students still prefer to have at least some human contact and personal guidance in their education, and online programs are increasingly expanding to include some form of physical presence as well. The line between such "Cyber U's" and regular universities is becoming increasingly blurred.

Today, it is clear that the very nature of education has changed in several important ways. First, there has been a marked shift towards "just-in-time" learning – of people taking coursework when they feel it is needed for their career or personal development, rather than separating learning from the rest of life as in the traditional model. (Indeed, Governor Mooney, in his second term, encouraged this trend by making vouchers and loans available for coursework, and not just degree programs.)

Second, the notion of "computer literacy" – so popular a decade ago – has dissolved into a non-issue. In an age where computers are both ubiquitous and easy to use, people no more need "computer literacy" to benefit from the new technologies than they need "automotive literacy" in order to drive. Rather, the real impact of technology has been to raise the skill levels required in nearly every job, from retail sales clerks to attorneys, as most routine tasks are increasingly managed by a few lines of software code.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the very definition of a "general education" has been transformed. Instead of its previous emphasis on subject matter – learning a little bit about everything – the phrase is now understood to stand for the development of a broad skill set that can be applied to any situation, such as curiosity, communication skills, analytical reasoning, and emotional intelligence. In an age when most households have access to a virtual Library of Congress in their living room, it is widely understood that the purpose of education is not to fill students' heads with facts, but rather to provide them with a passion for lifelong learning and the basic tools they need for converting information into knowledge.

Today's community colleges therefore look radically different than they did just a decade ago. In a booming education market and flush with state funding, even the less inventive institutions have been able to muddle through the decade. But those community colleges that seized decisively on the new market opportunities to develop strong positions as "focused specialists" or "wired generalists" are now thriving beyond their wildest expectations.

In California's robust economy, it is not only the high technology niches that are performing well; generally, any program that is recognized as being among the best in the state at what it does is handsomely rewarded by students bearing vouchers in hand, whether online or in person. The trick for campuses isn't necessarily to pick

the "hot" area to pursue – although that never hurts – but rather to realize what things you do best and to nurture and market those capabilities to their fullest.

As of this writing, in the Fall of 2008, Governor Mooney, emboldened by the success of his voucher program, is aggressively campaigning for a ballot initiative that would go even further, to allow California students to take their vouchers to out-of-state campuses. Meanwhile, a loose coalition of young faculty "stars" across the state system is asking voters to support a measure to eliminate the tenure system so they can market their services more effectively as free agents.

Having already survived a decade of wrenching – if exciting – change, educators and administrators can only hold their breathe until November.

SCENARIO PLANNING - WORKSHOP II

Scenario Planning Workshop I, held in July 1998, clarified external forces shaping College of Marin's future and defined four divergent scenarios within which the College might exist a decade from now. Following Workshop I, several internal and community discussions were held to review and respond to the four scenario narratives. As President Middleton reported in his introductory comments at the start of Workshop II, "The strategic conversation helped us recognize that we aren't an island. We realize that things happening outside our own jurisdiction have an impact on us. Important questions are being raised. What should our culture be? What should we be offering?"

Workshop II completed the second phase of the scenario planning process. This workshop, held on November 5-6, 1998, brought twenty college staff and community representatives together to address the difficult task of recommending strategic priorities and actions which can best position the College of Marin given the assumption that the future is highly unpredictable and may lead in significantly divergent directions.

The following material summarizes
Workshop participants' assessment of College values and culture
Options considered as possible strategies
Recommendations for priority strategies

While this workshop (and the overall scenario planning process) provides general recommendations, the College and the Marin community must continue to monitor future trends and driving forces, to define appropriate general directions, and to develop detailed actions which make strategic priorities real.

Moving from scenarios to strategy

The following are the orientation comments from the workshop consultant, Mr. Chris Ertel, Global Business Network.

At our first workshop in late July, we created four scenarios for the future environment that College of Marin and the rest of California's community colleges will encounter for the next ten years. The group did excellent work, creating four stories that we agreed were plausible, challenging, and relevant to the focal question that you chose ("Should College of Marin become a smaller institution in order to sustain a higher level of excellence?"). During the months since then, we at

GBN have refined these draft scenarios into detailed narratives, with some feedback and guidance from College of Marin.

At our first workshop, you'll recall that I forbade us to talk about College of Marin. The sole purpose of this workshop was to lift our horizon beyond our daily concerns and stretch our thinking a bit about what may be the outside pressures and opportunities that the world might throw at us in the coming decade. By contrast, at this workshop, we will be talking only about College of Marin, and your choices for the future. This workshop is about moving from the scenario stories themselves to drafting a strategy for the future of this College.

Why do we bother to tell scenarios? There are three main reasons. The first is to "rehearse the future" in a way that allows us to be more responsive and alert to changes as they occur. If we have already played out a story in our own minds, we're more likely to recognize it quickly in real life and act accordingly. The second reason is to generate ideas for breakthrough innovation. It's our experience that creativity is most often simply a matter of rubbing two known ideas up against each other in a new way. Scenarios provide a great framework for that. But the third, main reason we do scenarios - and especially in the case of this project - is to use the stories as a framework for embarking on a strategic conversation that will ultimately lead to a sense of shared vision on campus about the general direction that you want to be headed.

Our goal in the next two days is simple. We want to create a draft strategy for College of Main that focuses on a few high-level objectives, which will serve as the starting point for a strategic conversation with the Board and the campus and outside communities. This draft strategy - and I underscore that it is only a draft - will serve as the centerpiece of a strategic conversation. It will be your message to the other interested parties: "this is where we think College of Marin should be headed in the next ten years". In making this statement, you'll make it clear that this is not the final word on the topic - that you are open to refinements and other ideas. At any rate, this group does not have the authority to execute a strategy by yourselves. You must engage the rest of the campus community to achieve this. From this larger conversation that you will start after our workshop is over, the acting strategy will emerge - whether it is your original proposal or some other one.

What is a strategy? It is a clear, shared understanding of the general direction in which you want to go, and a plan of how you intend to get there. Making strategy means making a very few high-level decisions that will make the many small, daily decisions much easier to manage. In creating strategy, you use analysis, self-knowledge, and discipline to make choices about your own future.

The difficult words here are discipline and choices. Very few people want to make choices; we want to have it all. When you get a bunch of people together to make choices, it's even harder because our personal interests clash. But choose we must, because the alternative simply isn't viable. To not choose is also to make a choice - a choice in favor of aimless drift and ineffectiveness.

In the next two days, we'll be using the scenario stories to help us get to a strategy. But which is the most likely scenario, you might ask? If we could figure this out, that would make our task much easier. But as Yogi Berra once said: "The only thing I never try to predict is the future". We simply don't know which future will come true. In all likelihood, the actual future will contain some elements of each of the four stories we've told here - plus a bunch of other elements that we haven't even thought of. The best we can do is to create a strategy that we think would work reasonably well in a wide range of futures, and to adjust our strategy

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accordingly as the future unfolds.

As Arie deGeus wrote in The Living Company: "Scenarios are stories. They are works of art, rather than scientific analyses. The reliability of (their content) is less important than the types of conversation they spark."

So: Let the conversation begin!

Primary Activity One
Brainstorming, Clustering, Ranking

Brainstormed 158 possible strategies under one or more of the scenarios.
Sorted the 158 strategies into 25 clusters of strategies.
Voted tentative rankings of the proposed strategy clusters (Votes indicated in brackets, below).
Brainstormed tactics which might improve chances for success under each of the scenarios.

Preparing for "For Sale to the Highest Bidder" Future
(A low-income future with fewer regulations in which colleges must rely on broad entrepreneurial and partnership initiatives.)

Brainstorming Cluster of Options
Find new uses for existing facilities (including rentals) [16 votes]
Expand training for health professions and coursework in alternative medicine and holistic rehabilitation [12]
Strengthen four-year/transfer instruction, emphasizing COM as high prestige performer [11]
Expand specialized services and services to strengthen convenience and access for underserved groups. [7]
Develop entrepreneurial/non-traditional income to be used to subsidize high cost programs. [2]
Emphasize Elderhostel/Emeritus programs for Marin's older citizens [1]
Initiate new library /media technology program to develop new income and serve emerging needs [0]
Sell our souls by doing whatever makes money. [0]

Brainstorming Tactics Supporting Success
Increase local tax base funding.
Be ready to seek markets where other community colleges fail.
Upgrade marketing efforts.
Shrink number of programs. Increase competitive quality.

Preparing for "Beggars at the Banquet" Future
(A low-income, high competition future in which colleges struggle with program/service consolidation and cuts.)

Brainstorming Cluster of Options
Focus on high-volume programs [15]
Focus on high fee populations [13]

Weed out marginal programs/services and use resources to feed continuing core programs [12]
Develop partnerships with regional schools, businesses and other colleges [9]
Expand business-focused programs leading to direct employment [5]
Emphasize college as convener of debates/discussion on primary community issues. [0]

Brainstorming Tactics Supporting Success
Rent out facilities. Big events on campus to raise money.
Get volunteer labor and funding to repair facilities.
Emphasis on programs with categorical funding.
Renegotiate contract so that marketing and recruitment is part of job description.
Create "rainy day fund" to deal with boom/bust cycle.
Strengthen philanthropy and tax increases.

Preparing for "Uncle Harry's Will" Future
(A higher-income, high competition future emphasizing accountability, grant programs, business and career preparation, and technology.)

Brainstorming Cluster of Options
Expand alternative delivery and support services [20]
Increase emphasis on high technology programs [19]
Build on areas of traditional strength (Emeritus, film, etc.) and broaden special programming for non-profit agencies [10]
Expand niche programs which respond to business and community needs [2].
Re-purpose existing facilities for conference center, tech center, dorms or other use. [1]

Brainstorming Tactics Supporting Success
Cherry-pick from governor's list of outcome criteria to fit local values.
Increase research staff to measure results better.
Strengthen job placement programs and track results.
Create formal system to monitor competitors.
Detailed data tracking of COM's success.
Reject state funding to retain flexibility.
Develop annual report cards of success - K-12 model.
Expand marketing of distance ed. niche courses internationally.
Use "cash cows" to fund missionary programs not on governor's list.
Review faculty annually.
Retool staff to produce new products.
Tuition refund. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Preparing for "Great Education Society" Future
(A higher-income future addressing social need through education and outreach for traditionally underserved demographic groups.)

Brainstorming Cluster of Options
Increase access for traditionally underserved and underenrolled groups[21]
Develop new programs to serve underserved groups (ESL, West Marin citizens, environmental topics, art, entrepreneurism, high-tech, and welfare training) [14]
Expand College's roles as civic institution by providing community dialogues, lecture series, and special services such as support for K-12 school and/or

expanded childcare services [9]
Refurbish campus to make it more appealing [5]
Strengthen College transfer role [2]
Re-purpose existing facilities for conference center, tech center, dorms or other use. [1]

Brainstorming Tactics Supporting Success
Hire more instructors. Decrease class size.
Each highly educated person who enrolls needs to bring a less educated person for whom COM covers tuition-"buddy system."
Marketing/recruitment.
Training on diversity issues.
Increase security on campus-violence prevention.
Focus on distinctive areas, versus trying to be all things to all people.

Primary Activity Two
Clarifying the Institutional Environment in Which Successful Strategies are Developed

The following were shared as criteria for "successful strategies"

1. Cultural fit - is consistent with the core values and culture of the organization;

2. Strategic fit - draws on the core competencies and strategic assets of the organization;

3. Risk performance - strikes a balance between risk and return that is consistent with the organization's culture; and

4. Financial performance - can be sustained in the long run financially.

To set a context for choosing strategic priorities, the workshop participants explored College of Marin's:
Apparent current strategy
Core values
Distinctive Competencies
Strategic assets
Attitudes toward taking risks

Current Strategy of the College of Marin

Before creating a new strategy, participants were asking to describe the current strategy of College of Marin.
We are currently living in the "Beggars at the Banquet" world, and wishing we were in "The Great (Education) Society".
We're not always sure who we're serving.
Our current strategy is "weed and feed" (strategic pruning of non-essential elements in order to support core elements).
Categorical funding and legacy systems present strategy constraints.
Our strategy needs to be filtered with ethical concerns.

In a context of steadily decreasing funds, we're taking a "finger in the dike" approach to strategy - just dealing with crises as they come up.
We have a survival-oriented strategy - living off the remaining fat. Soon there won't be any left.
The "parts" of COM are stronger that the "whole" which doesn't have a strong identity.
Adversarial relations between labor and management make it difficult to arrive at shared vision around a strategy.
Our strategy is reactive, not proactive.
We are trying to be all things to all people.
In cutting budgets, we are "starving the body" as opposed to cutting off fingers and/or toes (i.e., choosing to starve everything more or less equally rather than pruning strategically).
We are struggling with the balance between our missionary and our mercenary functions.
The current strategy has no filtering device. We have no basic guideline for determining which ideas and services are mission-central when decisions about resources need to be made.

Core Values of College of Marin

Before deciding on a proposed strategy, the group was asked to identify those elements of the culture of the College of Marin that - for better or worse - should be considered the "core values" of the organization. It was agreed that any future strategy would need to take into account the strengths and limitations of these core values. Note that some of these values directly contradict others.
Autonomy - both personal and professional.
A desire to contribute to and enrich the lives of the students.
High value, low cost.
Faction-based, pluralistic system of governance.
Egalitarianism - access, equal opportunity.
Respect for and support of faculty.
Commitment to making a difference in people's lives.
Providing a high quality of teaching.
Educating the "whole person."
Academic freedom.
To be all things to all people.
Elitism. Lack of respect for vocational faculty. Hierarchy of faculty.
Access to older people and the disabled.
Consensus-oriented culture.
Rule-bound culture.
Open-door culture.

Distinctive Competencies of College of Marin

The following is a list of items that the workshop participants agreed are parts of the College's current offering that are distinctive and offer a very high value from the customers' perspective. These are the collective answers of the group to the question: "If someone from the community who didn't know College of Marin asked what do you do really well here, what would you tell them?"
Disabled students program. Aided by innovative leadership and categorical funding.
Transfer programs.
Arts program.

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Student leadership program.
Community Education and Services Program (non-credit, fee-based).
Emeritus College.
Environmental Sciences.
Health Sciences program.
CIS (computer information systems).
Multimedia studies.
Physical Education Department - especially for its breadth of offerings.
Language Department. Good for intensive study before travel-high demand for modular language study.
Career education/vocational programs (e.g., court reporting).
Re-entry programs (non-categorical).
Work experience program.
Internship program.
School to career partnerships.
Concurrent enrollment. (High school students simultaneously taking College of Marin courses)

Strategic Assets of College of Marin

Workshop participants were then asked to identify the substantial strategic assets of College of Marin. Strategic assets are specific resources that can be called upon in executing a long-term strategy.
Longevity in the community. There are a large number of alumni and people in the area who have taken classes.
Beautiful locations.
Availability of buildings and land.
Small class size. High touch. Strong professorial relationships.
Safety of campus.
Growing foundation (internal and external). Good funding for scholarships.
Strong (improved) Board of Trustees that works well with the administration.
ESL student population - a growing population that could be tapped.
A dedicated faculty.
Participatory/shared governance system.
Marin a wealthy county - potential asset.
Relationships with county agencies.
Diversified funding base.
Relationship with Marin County Office of Education.
Leadership and management team.
Personal accessibility.
Improved press image/public perception.
Small size/human scale.
Willingness to jump. Get a lot out of lean resources. "Squeeze blood from a stone."
Growing business environment, in particular multi-media.
Willingness to experiment in new partnerships.
Momentum of creative fundraising.

Attitudes about Risk at College of Marin

Participants were asked to discuss what kind of strategy would be most consistent with the organizational culture of College of Marin. Participants were presented with four types of general strategies to choose from:

1. Robust strategy - low risk, low return; works in all future scenarios

2. Beat-the-farm strategy - high risk, high return; choose a future that you want and bet everything on it happening

3. Multiple-bets - like a diversified portfolio; spread your bets across the possibility of different futures occurring

4. Test and pilot - start with your present base and test programs in a variety of areas to see what works; must be very agile to execute well

Highlights
Entrenched culture prevents agile execution.
Risk adverse, security oriented.
Need to make educated bets.
Reluctance to "bet the farm."
Lack of experimentation and risk taking. "Glass is half full" attitude.
Need to follow some high-risk strategies to survive. Current status quo strategies will only work for a short time.
Avoiding risk presents the highest risk.

Primary Activity Three
Selecting Proposed Strategies for College of Marin

Participants were asked to create coherent strategies to propose that combined three or four high-level elements, and would together meet the four criteria for a winning strategy (strategic fit, cultural fit, financial performance, and risk performance).

After the group had created 17 proposed strategies in all, each participant was given three votes that they could distribute however they chose among the proposed strategies. The first four "favored" strategies, below, were those that received a total of 10 or more votes; the additional proposed strategies were those that received a total of 4 votes or fewer.

In addition, the current strategy of College of Marin - as it was understood by the group in the earlier discussion - was offered as an additional option. This option received zero votes.

Favored Strategies

Greater emphasis on the non-credit program with emphasis on ESL.
New uses for existing facilities.
A commitment to test and pilot 2 new programs every year.
More focused general ed.

Support cost effective transfer and career programs.
Increase access and celebrate customer service.
Broaden a fiscally strong non-credit program, including a model health and wellness program.

Build the infrastructure, staff and training to provide a high tech base for the future.

Expand programs that create opportunities for under-served population (e.g. career, ESL).
Increase access for focused delivery of general education.
Expand niches in health/wellness and environmental strengths.

Expand access and delivery to under-served students.
High fee focused programs (what the market and our facilities bear).
A focused general ed transfer program.
Career education.

The Proposed Strategy

After much discussion, the group endorsed the following five-point long-term strategy for further discussion and development by the COM Board and management, as well as by the larger campus and outside communities.
More focused general education. We cannot be all things to all people.
Broaden fiscally strong non-credit programs with a strong commitment to health, wellness, and the environment. Support by testing and piloting programs in search of cash cows.
Expand programs and services that provide opportunities for the under-served.
Strengthen industry-responsive career education programs.
Build infrastructure, staff, and training to provide a high-tech base for the future.

Primary Activity Four

Defining Tactics and Next Steps to Support the Strategies

Tactics

The group identified the following tactics as being critical to support the proposed strategy.
Communication is key. We need to create a "parking lot readable" publication that explains what we're doing.
We should tap revenue from exploiting new uses for old facilities to pay for some of this.
Explore possibility of tax campaign.
Expand further on meaning of five points.
We need to get the President on the road, communicating this to the campus and outside communities.
We should work on internal communications first, including forums.
Use planning software for focus group discussions.

Next Steps

Finally, for each major element of the proposed strategy, the group identified major next steps that could be taken to begin moving in the direction laid out by the strategy.

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1. More focused general education
Research on cost-effectiveness of existing programs and courses
Find benchmark programs - external or internal.
Review articulation agreements.
Initiate departmental discussion of core curriculum.
Look at areas where there exist multiple options to fill the same environment.
Create subgroups to communicate work.

2. Broaden non-credit programs
Market research on health, wellness and the environment. Consider local demand and others.
Address internal resistance to non-credit expansion.
Look for credit courses that could be taught for non-credit at a higher fee.
Cost benefit analysis of non-credit programs for fiscal strength.
Use the disabled students program as the initial step for health and wellness.
Educate the faculty on what a "fiscally strong non-credit class" is. A web site?
Create a web site for communication about this work.

3. Programs and opportunities for the under-served
Identify under-served populations.
Explore ESL components for each vocational program (VESL).
Need a better phone system.
Make website multilingual. Multi-lingual materials-for basic courses and marketing.

4. Industry responsive career education programs
Conduct market research on industry needs.
Consider hiring a business outreach coordinator.

5. Build a high-tech base for the future
Define what staff training is needed. Identify the size of the problem.

APPENDIX I

List of Participants at November 5-6, 1998, Workshop

Shahla Azam-Sheikh, President of Associated Students of Indian Valley Campus, College of Marin

Dona Boatright, Vice President of Academic Affairs, College of Marin

Barbara Bonander, ESL Instructor and Member, Academic Senate, College of Marin

Sandy Boyd, Dean of Career Education, Social Science and Athletics; Indian Valley Campus Site Manager, College of Marin

Charles Gompertz, President, College of Marin Foundation; business and executive leadership strategic planning consultant

Don Jen, Program Director, Marin Community Foundation

Paula Kutansky-Brown, Transfer and Career Center Technician; Curriculum Committee, College of Marin

Kelley Litz, Executive Secretary to Vice President of Academic Affairs; Classified Senate; Budget, Instructional Equipment, and Health and Safety Committees, College of Marin

Arthur Lutz, Machine and Metals Technology Instructor, College of Marin

Marie McCarthy, Coordinator, Disabled Students Program and Services; President, Academic Senate, College of Marin

James Middleton, President, College of Marin

Scott Miller, Vice President of Business Services, College of Marin

Julie Oyle, Typist/Clerk, Admissions and Records; Fringe Benefits Committee; College of Marin

Norm Pacula, Business Management Instructor; Vice President, Academic Senate, College of Marin

Abbie Schwarzberg, Student Trustee, College of Marin

Howard Schoof, President, Board of Trustees, College of Marin; College of Marin Foundation; Digital Village Foundation

Chris Schultz, Dean of Student Development and Special Services, College of Marin

Catherine Sim, Dance Instructor, College of Marin

Barbara St. John, Staff Secretary, Maintenance and Operations Department; Secretary, Classified Senate; Governance Review Council; Self-Study Budget Committee Chair; College of Marin

Wanden Treanor, Attorney; Member of Board of Trustees, College of Marin

Victoria Vieria, Foreign Language Instructor, Department Chair, College of Marin

GBN Project Team

Chris Ertel, Consultant and Project Leader, Global Business Network

Nicole Boyer, Junior Consultant, Global Business Network

Diana Scearce, Research Associate, Global Business Network

Note: Ling Song, Director of Research and Planning, served as a research resource to the workshop, and Nancy Faw, Assistant to the President, managed logistics for

the workshop.

Feedback

We hope that you've enjoyed reading about the scenarios for the future of College of Marin. Now it's your turn to let us know what you think.

We would be especially interested in your answers to the following questions:

Did you find the scenarios plausible? Did you believe each story could actually happen, more or less, in the next decade? If not, which parts of the stories did you have a hard time believing?

For each scenario, what do you think College of Marin should do to position itself effectively in this world? In other words, if we knew for certain today that this is the future that will unfold, what should College of Marin start doing today to ensure its future success?

Do you see any future strategic directions for College of Marin that would be successful in each of the four scenarios? What are they?

If you live or work in Marin County, we'd also like to know how you think each scenario would affect the people and businesses of the County? How would these different futures affect the needs of the County from College of Marin?

When you write, send your mail to jlisetor@marin.cc.ca.us, and please let us know who you are, and what is your relationship to, or interest in, College of Marin.

Thanks!